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Let's Continue to Advocate for Mammography and Breast Self Exams

Filed under UNCATEGORIZED

{3 COMMENTS}

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When a woman hears the words “breast cancer” her world narrows dramatically. Though not the leading cause of death in women, it is one that can dramatically affect her quality of life through her relationships with family and community. Treatments include removing both breasts (mastectomy) with immediate reconstruction, simple biopsy or lumpectomy (just removing the affected breast tissue).

According to the American Cancer Society and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this year over 200,000 people will be diagnosed with breast cancer. Of these, 40,000 will die from breast cancer and one percent of those diagnosed will be men. Interestingly, in the last five years the death rate has decreased even as the rate of diagnosis has remained steady. This is due in large part to the tremendous effort made over the last decade encouraging women to have annual mammograms.

I am a strong advocate of breast self exams (BSE) and mammography. Despite the controversy over when, who and how often mammograms are done, women continue to vote with their breasts and have one annually. And since cancer has been in your breast at least five to seven years before it can be identified on a mammogram, a monthly BSE is critical.

Some cancers are found on mammograms as tiny grains of salt or sand. Termed ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) and often called pre-cancerous, this form of cancer has a greater than 95 percent cure rate and may be treated with simple surgery and radiation.

While the majority of breast cancers start in the ducts of the breasts, some begin in the breast lobules — the glands that produce milk. Lobular cancer is very difficult to detect with traditional mammography as it is less likely than other forms of breast cancer to cause a firm breast lump. Because of this, lobular cancer often appears as a thickening of the tissue, a new area of fullness, swelling or change in the texture of the skin, such as a dimpling, that suddenly appears.

Now you understand why many consider BSE an important component of a healthy routine. Treatment for most breast cancer is surgery, possible x-ray treatment and hormone or chemotherapy. And advances in technology have allowed medical oncology to further identify tumor components and treatments. No longer is everyone getting toxic medications. Some may take a hormone blocking medication for five to seven years while others have

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chemotherapy that is less physically taxing. Even radiation has changed to create a more targeted therapy with less disruption to underlying body parts such as the heart and lungs.

It used to be a celebration when breast cancer patients reached the five-year mark. While we know that some breast cancers can reoccur within two years, we are now looking to the 10-, 15- or 20-year mark.

So what do we do? Let's celebrate the research and technology that have allowed women and men diagnosed with breast cancer to live longer, with less problems and side effects. Let's continue to advocate for annual mammograms and monthly BSE. Let's grow closer to our families that have supported us and the community that has fought for us. Let's continue to be the best we can possibly be and achieve that dream of a cure — something I'm passionate about as a survivor of my mother's breast cancer.

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Pam

Loved your blog , Nikki.

I am feeling great & enjoying the cooler weather. Trev is doing better too.

Thank heaven.

Amy

Great information!

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